

HEERE BIGYNNETH THE PRIORESSES TALE



WAS IN ASYE, IN A GREET CITEE,
Amonges cristene folk, a Jewerye,
Sustened by a lord of that contree
for foule usure, and lucre of vileynye,
Hateful to Crist and to his compaignye;
And thurgh the strete men myghte ride or
wende,
for it was free, and open at eyther ende.

A litel scole of cristen folk ther stood
Doun at the ferther ende, in which ther were
Children an heepe, yemen of cristen blood,
That lerned in that scole yere by yere
Swich manere doctrine as men used there,
This is to seyn, to synge and to rede,
As smale children doon in hire childhede.

AMONG these children was a wydwe
sone,
A litel clergeon, seven yere of age,
That day by day to scole was his wone,
And eek also, whereas he saugh thymage
Of Cristes mooder, hadde he in usage,
As hym was taught, to knele adoun and seye
His Ave Marie, as he goth by the weye.

Thus hath this wydwe hir litel sone ytaught
Oure blisful lady, Cristes mooder deere,
To worshipe ay, and he forgate it naught,
for sely child wol alday soone leere;
But ay, whan I remembre on this mateere,
Seint Nicholas stant evere in my presence,
for he so yong to Crist dide reverence.

This litel child, his litel book lernynge,
As he sat in the scole at his prymur,

He Alma redemptoris herde synge,
As children lerned hire anthiphoner;
And, as he dorste, he drough hym ner and ner,
And herkned ay the wordes and the noote,
Til he the firste vers koude al by rote.

Noght wiste he what this Latyn was to seye,
for he so yong and tendre was of age;
But on a day his felawe gan he preye
Texpounden hym this song in his langage,
Or telle him why this song was in usage;
This preye he hym to construe and declare
ful often time upon his knowes bare.

His felawe, which that elder was than he,
Answerde hym thus, This song I have herd seye,
Was makid of oure blisful lady free,
fire to salve, and eek hire for to preye
To been oure help and socour whan we deye;
I kan na moore expounde in this mateere,
I lerne song, I kan but smal grammeere.

And is this song makid in reverence
Of Cristes mooder? seyde this innocent;
Now certes, I wol do my diligence
To konne it al, er Cristemasse is went;
Though that I for my prymur shal be shent,
And shal be beten thries in an houre,
I wol it konne, oure lady to honoure!

His felawe taughte hym homward prively
fro day to day, til he koude it by rote,
And thanne he song it wel and boldely
fro word to word, acordynge with the note;
Twies a day it passed thurgh his throte,
To scoleward and homward whan he wente;
On Cristes mooder set was his entente.

As I have seyd, thurghout the Jewerie
This litel child, as he cam to and fro,
ful murily than wolde he synge and crie
O Alma redemptoris, everemo.
The swetnesse hath his herte perced so
Of Cristes mooder, that, to hire to preye,
he kan nat stynte of synngynge by the weye.

URE firste foo, the serpent Sathanas,
That hath in Jewes herte his waspes nest,
Up swal, and seide, O Hebrayk peple, allas!
Is this to yow a thyng that is honest,
That swich a boy shal walken as hym lest
In youre despit, and synge of swich sentence,
Which is agayn youre lawes reverence?

fro thennes forth the Jewes han conspired
This innocent out of this world to chace;
An homicide therto han they hyred,
That in an aleye hadde a privee place;
And as the child gan forby for to pace,
This cursed Jew hym hente and heeld hym faste,
And hitte his throte, and in a pit hym caste.

I seye that in a wardrobe they hym threwe

Whereas thise Jewes purgen hire entraille.
CURSED folk of Herodes al newe!
What may youre yvel entente yow availle?
Mordre wol out, certeyn, it wol nat faille,
And namely, ther thonour of God shal sprede,
The blood out/crieth on youre cursed dede.

O martir, sowed to virginitee,
Now maystow synge, folwynge evere in oon
The white Lamb celestial, quod she,
Of which the grete Evaungelist, Seint John,
In Pathmos wroot, which seith that they that
goon
Biforn this Lamb, and synge a song al newe,
That nevere, fleshly, wommen they ne knewe.

THIS povre wydwe awaiteth al that nyght
After hir litel child, but he cam noght;
for which, as soone as it was dayes lyght,
With face pale of drede and bisy thoght,
She hath at scole and elleswhere hym soght;
Til finally she gan so fer espie
That he last seyn was in the Jewerie.

With moodres pitee in hir brest enclosed,
She gooth, as she were half out of hir mynde,
To every place where she hath supposed
By likihede hir litel child to fynde;
And evere on Cristes mooder meeke and kynde
She cride, and atte laste thus she wroghte,
Among the cursed Jewes she hym soghte.

She frayneth and she preyeth pitously
To every Jew that dwelte in thilke place,
To telle hire if hir child wente oght forby.
They seyde Nay, but Jhesu of his grace,
Yaf in hir thoght, inwith a litel space,
That in that place after hir sone she cryde,
Where he was casten in a pit bisyde.

GRETE God, that parfournest thy laude
By mouth of innocents, lo heere thymyght!
This gemme of chastite, this emeraude,
And eek of martirdom the ruby bright,
Ther he, with throte ykorven, lay upright,
He Alma redemptoris gan to synge
So loude, that al the place gan to ryngel

The cristene folk that thurgh the strete wente,
In coomen, for to wondre upon this thyng;
And hastily they for the provost sente;
He cam anon, withouten taryng,
And herieth Crist that is of hevene Kyng,
And eek his mooder, honour of mankynde,
And after that, the Jewes leet he bynde.

This child, with pitous lamentacioun,
Aptaken was, synngynge his song alway;
And with honour of greet processcioun
They carien hym unto the next abbay.
His mooder swownynge by the beere lay;
Annethe myghte the peple that was there
This newe Rachel brynge fro his beere.

The
Prioresses
Tale